

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, comprising the steps of:

 sending a message to a central computer in the network identifying a remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

 receiving a processing message from the central computer including address data which has been selected by the central computer based on at least one characteristic of the remote computer;

 retrieving and processing information from the address data; and

 sending the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises a measure of the network connectivity of that remote computer.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein said measure of the network connectivity of the remote computer is determined with reference to at least one of the server computers to which the remote computer is connected.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of selecting said address data includes a comparison of a processing characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data.

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5. The method of claim 4, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of activity at that address.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises the time historically taken by that remote computer to process one unit of address data

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol based network.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a local area network.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the address data comprises a location of stored information on the Internet.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the remote computer is directly connected to the computer on which the information to be retrieved is stored, such that the remote computer is able to retrieve said information without using the Internet.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of sending a message to the central computer is initiated in response to a message from the central computer to ascertain if the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein processed information is stored in the remote computer and sent to the predetermined storage location at predetermined times.

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13. The method of claim 1, wherein the processing message includes a task and the raw data, and the raw data is processed in accordance with the task.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the address data comprises a batch of URLs (Universal Resource Locators).

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the processed information is sent to the central computer in a compressed and streamed format.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the processed information is stored on at least one server computer communicating with the remote computer and the central computer.

17. A method for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, which is categorised into a priority listing, comprising the steps of:

sending a message from a remote computer to a central computer in the network identifying the remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

receiving the message in the central computer and comparing the identity of the remote computer to stored identities for remote computers in the central computer;

in response to a failure to identify the remote computer in the stored identities, optionally assigning an identity for the remote computer and a predetermined characteristic;

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in response to a match identifying the remote computer in the stored identities, retrieving at least one characteristic of the remote computer from stored characteristics in the central computer;

assigning and sending a processing message to the remote computer including address data selected by comparison of at least one characteristic of the remote computer with the priority listing of the address data to retrieve;

retrieving and processing information from the address data by the remote computer ; and

sending the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises a measure of the network connectivity of that remote computer.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein said measure of the network connectivity of the remote computer is determined with reference to at least one of the server computers to which the remote computer is connected.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the step of selecting said address data includes a comparison of a processing characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of activity at that address.

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22. The method of claim 21, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of the frequency of updating the information at that address, or on the basis of the level of functionality associated with the information at that address.

23. The method of claim 17, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises the time historically taken by that remote computer to process one unit of address data.

24. The method of claim 17, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol based network.

25. The method of claim 17, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a local area network.

26. The method of claim 17, wherein the address data comprises a location of stored information on the Internet.

27. The method of claim 17, wherein the remote computer is directly connected to the computer on which the information to be retrieved is stored, such that the remote computer is able to retrieve said information without using the Internet.

28. The method of claim 17, wherein the step of sending a message to the central computer is initiated in response to a message from the central computer to ascertain if the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data.

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29. The method of claim 17, wherein processed information is stored in the remote computer and sent to the predetermined storage location at predetermined times.

30. The method of claim 17, wherein the processing message includes a task and the raw data, and the raw data is processed in accordance with the task.

31. The method of claim 17, wherein the address data comprises a batch of URLs (Universal Resource Locators).

32. The method of claim 17, wherein the processed information is sent to the central computer in a compressed and streamed format.

33. The method of claim 17, wherein the predetermined storage location is at least one server computer communicating with the remote computer and the central computer.

34. A remote computer for a system of retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, comprising:

a message initiator to send a message to a central computer in the network identifying the remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

a message receiver for receiving a processing message from the central computer including address data which has been selected by the central computer by comparison of at least one characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data;

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a processor for retrieving and processing information from the address data;
and

a transmitter to send the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

35. A system for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data comprising:

a message receiver to receive a message from a remote computer in the network identifying the remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

a comparator for comparing the identity of the remote computer to stored identities of remote computers and, in response to a failure to identify a remote computer in the stored identities, optionally assigning an identity for the remote computer and a predetermined characteristic;

a retriever to retrieve at least one characteristic of the remote computer from stored characteristics; and

a manager to assign and send a processing message to the remote computer including, address data selected by comparison of at least one characteristic of the remote computer with the priority listing of the address data to retrieve, and the predetermined storage location to which the processed information is to be sent.

36. A system for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, which is categorised into a priority listing, comprising:

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means for receiving a processing message from the central computer including address data which has been selected by the central computer by comparison of at least one characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data;

means for retrieving and processing information from the address data; and

means for sending the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises a measure of the network connectivity of that remote computer.

38. The system of claim 37, wherein said measure of the network connectivity of the remote computer is determined with reference to at least one of the server computers to which the remote computer is connected.

39. The system of claim 36, wherein the step of selecting said address data includes a comparison of a processing characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data.

40. The system of claim 36, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of activity at that address.

41. The system of claim 36, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises the time historically taken by that remote computer to process one unit of address data.

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42. The system of claim 36, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol based network.

43. The system of claim 36, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a local area network.

44. The system of claim 36, wherein the address data comprises a location of stored information on the Internet.

45. The system of claim 36, wherein the remote computer is directly connected to the computer on which the information to be retrieved is stored, such that the remote computer is able to retrieve said information without using the Internet.

46. The system of claim 36, including means for sending a message to the central computer initiated in response to a message from the central computer to ascertain if the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data.

47. The system of claim 36, wherein processed information is stored in the remote computer and sent to the predetermined location at predetermined times.

48. The system of claim 36, wherein the processing message includes a task and the raw data, and the raw data is processed in accordance with the task.

49. The system of claim 36, wherein the address data comprises a batch of URLs (Universal Resource Locators).

50. The system of claim 36, wherein the processed information is sent to the central computer in a compressed and streamed format.

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51. The system of claim 36, wherein the processed information is stored on at least one server computer communicating with the remote computer and the central computer.

52. A computer-readable medium containing a method for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, the method comprising the steps of:

sending a message to a central computer in the network identifying a remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

receiving a processing message from the central computer including address data which has been selected by the central computer based on at least one characteristic of the remote computer;

retrieving and processing information from the address data; and

sending the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

53. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises a measure of the network connectivity of that remote computer.

54. The computer-readable medium of claim 53, wherein said measure of the network connectivity of the remote computer is determined with reference to at least one of the server computers to which the remote computer is connected.

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55. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the step of selecting said address data includes a comparison of a processing characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data.

56. The computer-readable medium of claim 55, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of activity at that address.

57. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises the time historically taken by that remote computer to process one unit of address data

58. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol based network.

59. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a local area network.

60. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the address data comprises a location of stored information on the Internet.

61. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the remote computer is directly connected to the computer on which the information to be retrieved is stored, such that the remote computer is able to retrieve said information without using the Internet.

62. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the step of sending a message to the central computer is initiated in response to a message from the central

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computer to ascertain if the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data.

63. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the processed information is stored in the remote computer and sent to the predetermined storage location at predetermined times.

64. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the processing message includes a task and the raw data, and the raw data is processed in accordance with the task.

65. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the address data comprises a batch of URLs (Universal Resource Locators).

66. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the processed information is sent to the central computer in a compressed and streamed format.

67. The computer-readable medium of claim 52, wherein the predetermined storage location is at least one server computer communicating with the remote computer of the central computer.

68. A computer-readable medium containing a method for retrieving and processing stored information in a network containing address data, which is categorised into a priority listing, the method comprising the steps of:

sending a message from a remote computer to a central computer in the network identifying the remote computer and indicating that the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data;

receiving the message in the central computer and comparing the identity of the remote computer to stored identities for remote computer to stored identities for remote computer in the central computer;

in response to a failure to identify the remote computer in the stored identities, optionally assigning an identity for the remote computer and a predetermined characteristic;

in response to a match identifying the remote computer in the stored identities, retrieving at least one characteristic of the remote computer from stored characteristics in the central computer;

assigning and sending a processing message to the remote computer including address data selected by comparison of at least one characteristic of the remote computer with the priority listing of the address data to retrieve;

retrieving and processing information from the address data by the remote computer; and

sending the processed information from the address data to a predetermined storage location.

69. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises a measure of the network connectivity of that remote computer.

70. The computer-readable medium of claim 69, wherein said measure of the network connectivity of the remote computer is determined with reference to at least one of the server computers to which the remote computer is connected.

71. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the step of selecting said address data includes a comparison of a processing characteristic of the remote computer with a priority listing of the address data.

72. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein said priority listing for a particular data address is determined on the basis of activity at that address.

73. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein said at least one characteristic of the remote computer comprises the time historically taken by that remote computer to process one unit of address data

74. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol based network.

75. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the remote computer communicates with the central computer over a local area network.

76. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the address data comprises a location of stored information on the Internet.

77. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the remote computer is directly connected to the computer on which the information to be retrieved is stored, such that the remote computer is able to retrieve said information without using the Internet.

78. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the step of sending a message to the central computer is initiated in response to a message from the central computer to ascertain if the remote computer is available to retrieve and process stored information from address data.

79. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the processed information is stored in the remote computer and sent to the predetermined storage location at predetermined times.

80. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the processing message includes a task and the raw data, and the raw data is processed in accordance with the task.

81. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the address data comprises a batch of URLs (Universal Resource Locators).

82. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the processed information is sent to the central computer in a compressed and streamed format.

83. The computer-readable medium of claim 68, wherein the processed information is stored on at least one server computer communicating with the remote computer and the central computer.